

Yard and Garden – 06-01-2013 - Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door—
"Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door—
Only this and nothing more."

Edgar Allan Poe



Have you noticed a tapping on your window or perhaps your chamber door? If so, very likely this strange visitor may be *Turdus migratorius*, better known as the American robin (and nothing more).

Every spring it happens—conflicts between robins and windows. Without incitement or warning, a demented robin flies into your window, clunking it repeatedly. At first it may seem a bit humorous, but then one begins to seriously wonder if the bird has a mental illness and has gone totally bonkers.

Although this bizarre conflict between robins and windows occurs for a number of reasons, more than likely this peculiar action is associated with mating. Robins, like many birds, become territorial during the breeding season. If one could observe the scene from the bird's point of view, one could understand its behavior. The bird sees its reflection in the windowpane. Assuming the reflection to be an intruder, the robin defends its territory by attacking the window, over and over again. This constant crashing can last for weeks, from dawn until dusk. Such behavior becomes not only annoying but often messy. This relentless bombardment may leave the glass blood-streaked and covered with bird droppings. Worse yet, the bird may end up injured or dead.

What can a person do to prevent this behavior? One must first realize the problem is associated with the robin seeing its reflection on the exterior of the window. Any modifications or changes to the inside of the window such as closing drapes or drawing

the shades won't usually eliminate his reflection. Treatment must occur on the outside of the window for best results.

I offer a few suggestions. First, here's an excuse for all who hate cleaning windows. Although it's a pretty lame reason for not washing your windows, the fact is dirty windows reflect less. One can also purchase silhouettes of falcons or owls and place them on the outside of the window to frighten the robin. Unfortunately, it doesn't take long for the bird to realize the images are not real, and the problem resumes. How about creating barriers by covering the windows with netting? Place a hanging plant outside the window. Tape pieces of Mylar or aluminum foil to the outside of the window. The constant motion of these items fluttering in the breeze might help to keep birds away. Drape rubber snakes on top of the window frames, allowing them also to dangle in the breeze. I even read where one can rub a bar of soap or smear glass wax to the outside of the window changing it from transparent to opaque. In this case, I am reasonably sure such action would eventually motivate one to wash one's windows.

Although not always associated with mating, sometimes robins and other birds collide into windows for other reasons. Because glass is transparent, it has reflective properties that often mirror the illusion of sky or landscape. Such deception confuses birds causing them to collide into windows. Since these head-banging birds can be seriously injured or killed when hitting a window at great speeds, there is something you should know.

Do not attempt to care for the injured bird. In the US, all native migratory birds are protected under the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is illegal to keep any protected bird unless you have the required permits. Penalties for violating this law include fines up to \$500 and/or up to 6 months in jail for each offense. If the bird is seriously injured or doesn't recover in a few hours, contact the local Fish and Wildlife Service.

In closing, if a bird comes tapping while you are nearly napping— relax. I'm reasonably sure it will be a robin and not the raven "Nevermore" — rapping, rapping at your chamber door.

